

Dear SWD

Students from Lomandra School participated in the Sailors with Disabilities (SWD) program during 2011. They engaged in a sailing program that took them, weekly, onto the waters of Sydney Harbour. Captain Dave and his crew instructed them in the skills of sailing and demonstrated the teamwork approaches of good sailors.

Lomandra is a NSW Department of Education and Communities school in Campbelltown for students with severe challenging behaviours and/or mental health issues including Conduct Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Anxiety/Depression.

The impact of these individual attributes and conditions has been to significantly delay their academic learning and social skilling and to undermine their confidence as learners.

Lomandra School chose the SWD program to help our students with these concerns. We strive to create new opportunities for new learning, where students take on tasks they have never encountered before. Our aim here is twofold: firstly, to build their resilience as learners where if they don't succeed the first time they 'pick themselves up' and start again; secondly, for the students to engage in activities that are exciting and fun and to do so as members of teams working together.

The SWD program totally captured these two aims: our students were challenged as learners and as team members, but came back every week for more! The weather on some weeks had meant relatively big seas and the work was physically hard. It tapped into some natural instincts for challenge and positive risk-taking. For two boys, the perceived risks of sailing fired them up and when the yacht lurched in the wind and sea water drenched them, they quickly learnt to need for teamwork and communication!

The sheer delight can be seen in their faces of the many photographs taken and the exuberance they displayed when they returned to school: "That was unreal!"; "That's the best thing I've ever done!".

And this following exchange with Captain Dave:

Student: "Do you own this boat?"

Dave: "Yeah, I do. How much do you think one of these is worth?"

Student: "Aw, I dunno. About fifty thousand?"

Dave (mildly laughing): "Yeah...maybe just for the sail! The whole boat is worth 1.5 million."

Student (very surprised): "You're a very lucky man, Captain Dave. You must've worked hard to be able to own such a luxurious boat. Well done!"

The program put students in leadership/responsibility-taking roles and for at least one student (14 year old female student) this was the first time staff from Lomandra had seen her rise to the occasion and fully participate in a physical program. This in itself was a huge achievement. Other students, Captain Dave informed us, became good enough to crew on racing yachts!

I speak on behalf of my staff who organised this program with SWD and the students who participated when I say it was an incredible success. We support the very understanding, empathetic and professional approach that all of the SWD staff displayed with our students - who were very challenging in their behaviours at time. And we have already applied for another SWD program for our students this year!

Yours sincerely

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